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ASSEMBLAGE OF MEMORY: ON THE STRUCTURE, PROCESS AND CREATIVITY IN COLLECTIVE MEMORY

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Abstract. The article is aimed at presenting and discussing the theoretical concept of assemblage of memory inspired by and grounded in the creative work done in connection with social research within the framework of participatory theatre. Based on three projects of this kind that I have collaborated on over the last couple of years, all taking memory as their theme, *The Method of National Constellations* (2014–2016), *Prayer: A Common Theatre* (2016–2017), and *Bieżenki* (2018), the concept draws both on artistic, and sociological thinking. An assemblage of memory could be roughly described as a product of creativity, which is constructed using "found" materials, such as stories, images, emotions, behaviours, objects, people even, to compose a new meaningful entity. This is congruent with what became to be known as the assemblage theory, started by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who suggested that social phenomena, such as collective memory, one could add, should be viewed as dynamic and heterogeneous arrangements of a variety of elements, material and immaterial, natural and artificial, human and non-human, that are dependent on the connections between them rather than their intrinsic qualities. Thus, an assemblage of memory cannot be accessed through text-oriented methodologies that still seem to predominate the humanities (with its focus on the witness and testimony), but requires innovative, creative procedures, which, as exemplified by the above mentioned theatrical projects, are capable of revealing its structure and dynamics.

Keywords: assemblage, assemblage theory, collective memory, history, participatory theatre, theatre-based research practice.

Introduction

The article is aimed at presenting and discussing the theoretical concept of assemblage of memory inspired by and grounded in the creative work done in connection with social research within the framework of participatory theatre. Based on three projects of this kind that I have collaborated on over the last couple of years, all taking memory as their theme, *The Method of National Constellations*, *Prayer*, and *Bieżenki*, the concept draws both on artistic, and sociological thinking. For it is the artistic field that the assemblage as a form of expression originated in, only later picked up by philosophers and sociologists. In general terms, it can be described as a product of creativity, which is constructed using found materials, such

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as stories, images, emotions, behaviours, objects, *etc.*, adapted, or appropriated to compose a new meaningful entity. Hence, if we see memory as an assemblage, we see it as creative, pluralistic, and inclusive. In result, we become able to give up on the essentialist, integrative concept of a community of memory, potentially in conflict with other similar communities, in favour of multitude and diversity of memories, potentially bridged[1] across differences. This is also congruent with the concept of *agencement*, as introduced by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, who suggest that we should view social phenomena, such as collective memory, one could add, as dynamic and heterogeneous arrangements of a variety of elements, material and immaterial, natural and artificial, human and non-human, that are dependent on the connections between them rather than their intrinsic qualities. Thus defined, the assemblage of memory cannot be accessed through text-oriented methodologies that still seem to predominate the humanities (with its focus on the witness and testimony), but requires innovative, creative procedures, which, as exemplified by the above mentioned theatrical projects, are capable of revealing its structure and dynamics. As Svetlana Alexievich, whose work inspired the *Prayer* performance, noted: "the narrators are not only witnesses – least of all are they witnesses; they are actors and makers" (2018, xxi).

1. Assemblage as an artistic form

It has already been mentioned that the concept of assemblage originated in the artistic field, only later to be picked up by philosophers and sociologists. As a mixed-media form of visual art, the assemblage is a three-dimensional artwork made of a variety of found objects and materials, which earns its overall meaning from both material, and symbolic aspects of the components and their juxtaposition within the work. The term is believed to be introduced to the art world by Jean Dubuffet in the early 1950s with a series *Assemblages d'empreintes* (*Imprint Assemblages*), for which he used plant and animal parts, such as leaves and butterfly wings, later substituted with pieces of paper spotted and stained with ink. However, various avant-garde artists, including Pablo Picasso and Marcel Duchamp, and movements, such as cubists, futurists, Dadaists, had been already working with collages and found objects since the 1910s. In 1961, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City, New York, United States hosted an international exhibition *The Art of Assemblage*, curated by William C. Seitz, who selected over 250 works by 130 artists to be put on the show (later presented in Dallas, Texas, United States and San Francisco, California, United States). In the press release for the exhibition, the organisers explained:

> "An 'assemblage' (a more inclusive term than the familiar collage) is a work of art made by fastening together cut or torn pieces of paper, clippings from newspapers, photographs, bits of cloth, fragments of wood, metal or other such materials, shells or stones, or even objects such as knives and forks, chairs and tables, parts of dolls and mannequins, and automobile fenders" (Museum of Modern Art, 1961, p. 1).

[1] I owe the notion of "bridging" to Robert D. Putnam (1993) and his studies of two forms of social capital: bonding (mobilising similarities), and bridging (negotiating differences).

The list of materials and objects appropriated for the exhibited artworks goes on and on with every introduced artist, collagist, or sculptor: pieces of paper, newspapers, and other mass prints (Picasso, Georges Braque, Juan Gris), typographical samples (Gino Severini, Carlo Carrá), photographs and halftones (Max Ernst), buttons and magazine advertisements (George Grosz), bus and train tickets, stamps, wrappers, newsprint, buttons and other refuse collected in the streets (Kurt Schwitters), painted stone, shell, wood and mirror (Joan Miró), painted wood and staffed cloth (Yves Tanguy), wood and miscellaneous objects, like miniature boxing gloves (André Breton), pasted reproductions, wine glasses, marbles, maps and flowing sand, enclosed in glass-covered boxes (Joseph Cornell), used farm implements (Ettore Colla), abandoned parts of industrial, automotive and electrical equipment (Richard Stankiewicz), clinkers and portraits of butterfly wings (Dubuffet), old stair spindles and fragments of decorative wooden objects (Louise Nevelson), mirrors (George Cohen, Enrico Baj), dolls and mannequins (Edward Kienholz, Bruce Conner and others), or separate parts of their bodies (Arman), old books (John Latham), salvaged, mashed, bent and rusted car bodies (John Chamberlain), automobile bumpers (Jason Seley), cast-off bits and pieces of industrial debris (Jean Tinguely), eviscerated auto body shells (Cesar), discarded bicycles (Christo Coetzee), stuffed wolf head and tail, wooden tabletop and legs (Victor Brauner), mannequin head, sewing table, floor-length skirt (Kienholz), table, horn, pile of old papers (George Herms), household utensils (Daniel Spoerri), lacerated posters, scraped from walls (Jacques Villeglé, Raymond Hains, François Dufrene).

These are only the artists enumerated in the museum press release (out of 130 presented). The intention of the MoMA proponents of the assemblage behind the exhibition was evident; it was to "demonstrate that art could be created with any elements whatsoever" (Museum of Modern Art, 1961, p. 1). They saw the assemblage as an art form that allowed the incorporation of reality in the picture, without imitating it, as well as a medium for raising relevant questions about the nature of reality, visual arts, and the creative thinking. They also pointed out that: "The finished works of assemblage are often closer to everyday life than either abstract or representational art" (Museum of Modern Art, 1961, p. 3). Hence, the assemblage may be seen as but one more artistic practice of the modern age (aside the happening and performance, for instance, to mention only those relevant for the topic of this article) which was expected to bridge the cultural divide between art and life, the symbolic production of the art world and the lived experience of the ordinary people.

Although neither the press release, which I have abundantly referred to here, nor the complete exhibition catalogue by Seitz (1961) make no serious philosophical or sociological claims, the very assumption that the practice of assemblage may reveal something about the nature of reality and creativity can be found inspirational. Especially when one sees the assemblage not only as an artwork, but also as a medium of memory (that is a means of social communication which allows a person to share their experiences with others and over time). To give one example, I can easily imagine Schwitters (1887–1948) walking the streets of Hanover, Germany (where he lived and worked), picking up and filling his pockets with a variety of found objects, such as used tickets, lost buttons, or advertising leaflets, to be later incorporated into his assemblages (an activity I introduce as part of my qualitative methodology course, asking the students to go for a phenomenological walk around the city, and bring

back in class the different records of their experiences, including notes, photographs, drawings, audio recordings, objects, or even plant samples[2]). Schwitters dubbed his works *merz* to stress the fact that they were created out of trash. Unlike many an artist of that time, he was never a political agitator. But he was, literally speaking, a collector of the scraps of contemporary reality. Hence, on a certain level, some of his works chronicle historical events, like *Untitled (May 191)*, which can be directly linked to the Germany's revolutionary upheaval of 1918–1919 (Elger, 2004, pp. 62–63).

On the other hand, Schwitters was particularly praised for the cohesive composition of his works. In spite of much preoccupation of the art critics of that time with the variety of "unorthodox" materials and everyday objects the works were made of, it was the formal arrangement of those, otherwise random, elements that changed a pile of junk into an artwork. For on the aesthetic level, the work of assemblage is necessarily dependent on the way the objects and materials are combined into a single picture, organised, or structured by the artist. In this respect, the assemblage is bound by no artistic tradition or genre, and thus open to any possible material and object, and any possible configuration of these elements. As a creative process, assembling is, in fact, the work of selecting and linking. The motivations behind those selections and linkages might not be rational or even clear. They might well be led by intuition, aesthetic sensibility, or emotions. Schwitters, for instance, claimed that "art is nothing more than rhythm", the rhythm of forms and colours, and hence, wanted to create rhythms with the use of objects that fascinated him: trams, oil paints, and wooden blocks (Elger, 2004, p. 60). Defined as a creative arrangement of found objects and materials, and, on another level, of the symbolic meanings these elements might bring in (via their physical traits and genealogy), the concept of assemblage points, first and foremost, to the importance of connections (and the acts of establishing those connections) – between things, ideas or images, and people, and as such, might be seen as forerunning its newer philosophical and sociological counterparts.

Finally, in spite of the eventual failure of the 20th-century avant-garde movements to bridge art and life via novel forms of creativity,[3] they have unlocked, perhaps unintentionally, the democratic potential of art. Already in the early 1970s, Daniel Bell (1972) argued that much of the avant-garde, radical, anti-rational attitude got incorporated into the cultural mainstream, which took on the shape of "adversary culture", and became largely responsible for one of the major contradictions of capitalism. A decade past, Jürgen Habermas contended that the attempt to re-integrate art with the wider society, typical of the modern vanguards, was not a lost cause, provided the possibility of "reappropriation of the expert's culture from the standpoint of the life-world" (1981, p. 12). This can occur when aesthetic experience "is used to illuminate a life-historical situation and is related to life problems", and thus, "enters into a language game which is no longer that of the aesthetic critic" (Habermas, 1981, p. 12). What neither of the renown scholars acknowledged, though, is that, however isolated from the society and the real-life problems (namely, elitist), the avant-garde movements have introduced the society with means of artistic creation (not merely reception of art), such as

[2] The assignment was inspired by a *Transect Walk*, designed by Sacha Kagan, that I took part in during the European Sociological Association Arts Conference, 4–6 September, 2014, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

[3] In spite of their egalitarian agenda, the avant-garde movements failed to communicate with social masses, and sustained the isolated status of modern art.

the assemblage, or happening, which could be available to all, including the laypeople, those untrained neither in arts reception, nor production. Between the appropriation of the avant-garde by the popular mainstream, and the deprivation of that kind of art from its "aura" (see Benjamin, 2008), there has been a third door opened – to the creative engagement of the "everyday expert" (see Habermas, 1981, p. 12). This kind of practice is presently known by many names: social art (Niziołek, 2018a, 2019), new genre public art (Lacy, 1995a), participatory art (Bishop, 2012), dialogic art (Kester, 2004), or cooperative art (Finkelpearl, 2013), to mention but a few, perhaps the most influential ideas.

2. *Agencement* and the assemblage theory

The assemblage of memory, as a sociological concept rooted in theatrical experience, does not draw only on the artistic, practice-driven thinking, but also, yet without giving precedence to neither of the two, on the social theory. The latter has been initially introduced by philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, mostly in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2019) volume that dates back to 1980, and further developed in the 2000s, among others, by artist and philosopher Manuel DeLanda (2016, 2019), who has, in fact, proposed his own, revised and, given Deleuze's and Guattari's style of argumentation, more comprehensible version of the assemblage theory. Following DeLanda's theoretical stance, as well as the lessons of his predecessors, assemblages can be defined as, roughly speaking, wholes "constructed from heterogeneous parts" (2019, p. 3), "whose properties emerge from the interactions between [those] parts" (2019, p. 5). One thing that seems to me particularly compelling and promising in his approach is his attempt to take his readers on a journey from the micro- to the macro-level of the social realm, from the individual agent and interpersonal interactions, through the multiple intermediate structures and practices, to the social reality at large, which might also tell us something about the relationship between the individual and collective "stages" of memory.

In the first place, however, the assemblage theory should be traced back to the concept of *agencement* that Deleuze and Guattari scattered throughout *A Thousand Plateaus* (2019), as well as some other of their writings and talks, perhaps most notably *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (originally published in 1975, with the last chapter titled "What Is an Assemblage?") (1986, pp. 81–88), and *Dialogues* between Deleuze and Claire Parnet (1987), a journalist and his former student. The French term commonly translates as "layout", an arrangement of elements. It was Brian Massumi, a philosopher and social theorist himself, who used the word *assemblage*, when translating their work to English (actually following the example set by earlier translations) (Phillips, 2006).[4] It is worth remembering, though,

[4] Interestingly, in the Polish edition, it has been translated as *układ*, meaning – exactly – a layout, arrangement, or constellation, although the term *assemblage* (Polish *asamblaż*), borrowed from French, has been used in reference to the art of assemblage since the 1950s. This is probably a better approximation (if not simply a direct translation); for one thing, *agencement* may actually refer to both an action, and process of combining elements, and the result of that action/process, a given combination of elements, and unlike in English or French, there is no verb corresponding to the noun *assemblage* in Polish. DeLanda (2016, p. 1) points to the failure to capture that double, active and static, processual and structural, so to speak, sense of French *agencement* in English *assemblage* as well. In English, however, one can at least *assemble* things, like the assemblage artists did, with a meaning quite similar to French *agencer* – "match, fit together" (though French *assemblage* and *assembler* would be the direct equivalents, of course).

that Deleuze and Guattari did not use the French word *assemblage*, and that it was mostly the English translation that opened the way for associations of their theory with artistic practices of that kind, the assemblage art.[5]

It seems that the most quoted Deleuzian definition of the assemblage is the one from his conversation with Parnet:

> "What is an assemblage? It is a multipilicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes, and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 69).

In other words, an assemblage, by definition, comprises multiple different elements – bodies or terms, to use Deleuze's terminology – and has the capability of establishing sort of co-operative relations between these elements, so that they can function together, as an interdependent and coherent whole, like – an example given by Deleuze himself – a man on horseback standing on the stirrups (a man-animal-object assemblage), riding to battle in a cavalry unit to fulfil his obligation as a beneficiary in the feudal society (where the battle, the cavalry, feudalism – all add to larger-scale assemblages). "The feudal machine combines new relationships with earth, war, the animal, but also with culture and games (tournaments), with woman (courtly love); all sorts of fluxes enter into conjunction" – Deleuze further explains to Parnet (1987, p. 70).

The bodies and terms included in an assemblage "may be physical, biological, psychic, social, verbal" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 52). The concept of assemblage cuts across the nature-culture divide, includes both human and non-human agents, combines material and immaterial elements, brings together the individual and the collective. It emerges from "alliances" or "alloys" between the bodies and terms, from – rather metaphorical – "contagions, epidemics, the wind" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 69). These should be understood as the kinds of relations that respect the heterogeneity of the components instead of fusing them together into a homogeneous whole (see DeLanda, 2016, p. 2), like in the case of biological symbiosis, in which the relation between the symbionts does not define them as distinct species (entities, identities, or territories, to use the original vocabulary) (DeLanda, 2016, p. 3). According to Deleuze, it is "sympathy", "hatred or love", not "descent" or "identity" that bounds the bodies in an assemblage (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 52). The assemblage is not really defined by the components (with their different origins and characteristics), but by the conjunctions or connections between them – the "AND, AND, AND" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 34).[6]

[5] For a critical analysis of this translators' choice (see Phillips, 2006).

[6] Perhaps a vivid contemporary pop-cultural example of an assemblage would be Venom, the fictional character known from sci-fi comic books and cinema, an alien liquid-like, shape-shifting body bonded with a human host in a dual-life form. Those who have seen the 2018 blockbuster might remember that although merged together, the Symbiote and Eddie Brock retain their separate identities, are capable of interspecies communication and co-operation, and actually only due to that capability enjoy their enhanced powers. What is more, a Symbiote cannot merge with just any human body to create Venom. In laboratory trials, most of the candidates for hosts die in the process. The Symbiote must "desire" or choose the particular host, find one fit with their own potential.

Following Deleuze's lead, we should further distinguish between two aspects of assemblages: the "machinic assemblage" and the "collective assemblage of enunciation" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2019). The first corresponds with the bodily aspect of the arrangement, the content in a given assemblage, whether it is material (*e.g.* people, objects, places), or immaterial (ideas, emotions, social rules, aesthetic forms); the second with the symbolic aspect of the arrangement, the linguistic expression of a given assemblage. The artist, the artwork, the objects and materials incorporated in it, the concept or chance behind it, the creative effort of selection and juxtaposition, the form given to it, the wall it is hanged on, the viewers and their emotions, the institution of arts museum, and all the connections between these elements constitute a machinic assemblage, which is collectively enunciated as a piece of assemblage art. In this process, the subject or agent is not the artist, whose intentions play only one part in it, but a double-sided "abstract machine" that selects the content and couples it with expression (see Massumi, 1996).

Thus conceived, a concrete, historical assemblage, whether physical, or ideal, or a mix of the two, is an active, performative, creative[7] force theorised as the "affect". Deleuze sees the assemblage as "the minimum real unit" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1987, p. 51), capable to affect (influence, cause change) and be affected (influenced, changed). Hence, the noun *affect* does not denote a sentiment or feeling here, but as Massumi explains in his notes on the translation for *A Thousand Plateaus*, "is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another, and implying augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act" (2019, xv). It can be interpreted as: that what connects and coheres the different elements of the assemblage bringing it to existence, the driving force behind the action or process of assembling, the performative and creative power of the assemblage. In the case of art, this might be the rhythm that Schwitters sensed behind the composition of an artwork and intended to incorporate in his own assemblages.[8] In the case of social entities, the affect might be social capital which, following Putnam's famous research results, enhances the performative capability of democratic institutions:

> "Stocks of social capital, such as trust, norms, and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and collective well-being. These traits define the civic community. Conversely, the absence of these traits in the *un*civic community is also self-reinforcing. Defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder, and stagnation intensify one another in a suffocating miasma of vicious circles" (1993, p. 177).

Reading passages like this from *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, one almost cannot help thinking of the civic (and the uncivic) community as an assemblage in the Deleuzian sense. In a given community, social capital comprising trust, reciprocity and cooperation between people, organisations and institutions, whether abundant

[7] In this theoretical context, by "performative" I mean capable of effecting change inside or outside a given entity, by "creative" – capable of generating new entities, from ideas, to social networks, to art pieces, which is synonymous with "productive." It is noteworthy, though, that Deleuze associated creativity, more specifically, with interruptions in communication, the "hijacking of speech", and hence, a means to escape control (see Massumi, 1996).

[8] Interestingly, Deleuze and Guattari also refer to the notion of rhythm or refrain, as a repetitive process or action of forming assemblages (2019, pp. 361–408).

or scarce, makes the specific rhythm or refrain for a democratic assemblage defined by the emergent property of civicness, where "civicness" is not simply the opposite of "uncivicness", but a variable that denotes a wide range of possible realisations of the assemblage.

DeLanda has reconstructed the original philosophy of assemblage, so that it could be effectively used to explain "the irreducible complexity characterising the contemporary world" (2019, p. 5), with particular attention devoted to the solution to the micro-macro problem. According to DeLanda, much in congruence with Deleuze's and Guattari's earlier concept, assemblage thinking must be distinguished from both organicism/functionalism, and essentialism. Assemblages are neither defined by the functions of their separate parts, as required by the whole, nor by the necessary characteristics of those parts, as discrete entities, but by the active connections or interactions between them. One crucial modification DeLanda introduces to the concept is the replacement of the stratum-assemblage[9] opposition with variable parameters or "knobs" of de/coding (set to different values on the continuum of identity formation, or normative regulation) and de/territorialisation (boundary making, or inclusion/exclusion). Accordingly, some assemblages are well-defined and clearly delineated against the surrounding, like a history or still-life painting in a museum, or like the feudal system, while others are only vaguely expressed and with blurry boundaries, more like the avant-garde assemblage works, or like a democratic rule. Another novel claim made by DeLanda is that the reality, be it the social reality, is comprised of a number of smaller and larger assemblages, from interpersonal networks, to communities and organisations, to cities and countries, nested, like Russian dolls, inside each other, filling the so-called institutional, or social, void between the micro- and macrostructure of the society.

This is obviously a very brief account of a rich and complex theory; here I must refer the more inquisitive readers to the original works by the French philosophers, DeLanda and others.[10] For one thing, the assemblage can be linked to other concepts introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, such as the rhizome, or the plateau. For another, my short recapitulation makes for only one possible reading of their theory, which should probably be seen as an assemblage, or an open system, in its own right. Nevertheless, I hope it is sufficient for drawing out those characteristics of assemblages which will hold relevance for the theatre-based study of social memory: multiplicity, heterogeneity, interconnectedness, creative tendency, openness and inclusiveness, as far as Deleuze's and Guattari's notion is concerned; qualitative variability and nestedness, in the case of DeLanda's reconstruction of that notion. What I am especially interested in is the crossroads of theory and practice, science and art – the possibility of application of the assemblage approach to the understanding of what one could consider a site of memory, commemorative practice, community of memory, *etc.* within the milieu of the theatre-based participatory action research.

[9] By "stratum" Deleuze and Guattari (2019) seem to understand a heterogeneous layer of reality from which assemblages of different components and levels of cohesion emerge as products of the processes of de/coding and de/territorialistion, the two notions being relative to one another. In line with this reading of the theory, in the later part of this article, I will describe the stratum of the past as giving raise to the assemblages of history and memory, which, in turn, serve as strata to the assemblages of particular historical events and their interpretations, and so on.

[10] For the application of the concept of assemblage in different fields of study (see Assis, 2018 (music), Bennett, 2010 (political theory), Chaberski, 2016 (performance), Chidgey, 2018 (feminist studies), Hamilakis, 2017 (archeology), Lowenhaupt Tsing, 2015 (anthropology)).

3. Participatory theatre as sociological practice/research

Although the institution, community and artistic practices of theatre could be described in terms of assemblage as well, it is the collective memory performed and researched through participatory theatre which is put in the foreground in this article. To understand how participatory theatre brings an assemblage of memory into being, we will now look closer into the practices that enable this process. This is a very wide (not to say infinite) array of possibilities for direct engagement of the "everyday expert",[11] with a couple of model situations of participation, which – together with a playwright and director Michał Stankiewicz, as well some other collaborators and the participants themselves – we have explored and developed in the course of three participatory theatrical projects: *The Method of National Constellations*, *Prayer*, and *Bieżenki*. That long-term collaboration gave me, as an academic sociologist, a unique opportunity to observe the practices from the inside – from the position of the curator and producer, examine different models of participation in theatre,[12] and engage into an exchange between participatory theatre and social research, with the focus on collective memory.

In each of the three projects, we dealt with a different historical event still resonating in the regional memory of Podlasie:[13] the local raids by Polish anti-communist partisans in the aftermath of the World War II (WWII) (1946), the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, and the World War I (WWI) refugeehood (c. 1915). Each time, we resorted to different historical sources: an official document, a literary reportage, and oral history. In each case, we provided the participants with a different possibility for engagement with the past: from directed participation in a sequence of scripted documentary scenes, to chance-driven organisation of a polyphonic narration based on other people's recollections, to a largely autonomous choice of the content and form of the performance comprising familial memories and memorabilia.

The following descriptions of the three projects – *The Method of National Constellations*, *Prayer*, and *Bieżenki* – have the form of experiential, or practical cases. They are focused on the "mechanics" of each of the productions, related to different modes of engagement and forms of expression, responsible for the connective and creative power of the assemblage. In addition, offering an insight from the researcher-as-curator position signifies my own connection to the workings of the assemblage of memory in each of the cases. Similarly, the readers may find their own connections to the process through the act of reading, and perhaps imagining themselves as participants in the performances.

[11] The term has been perhaps most notably used by *Rimini Protokoll*, an artistic trio who are counted among "classics" of participatory theatre (see Malzaher, 2012).

[12] That resulted in a typology – also applied later in this article – of different roles that participants can take within a performance, such as the protagonist (a content provider), user (directed or animated by the artist in a theatrically constructed situation), and co-creator of a theatrical piece (enjoying a certain degree of agency and autonomy); for detailed descriptions (see Niziołek, 2016, 2018b).

[13] Podlasie is the North-Eastern part of Poland, a borderland region, noted for its ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, the capital of which is Białystok, a city with almost 300 000 population.

3.1. *The Method of National Constellations*

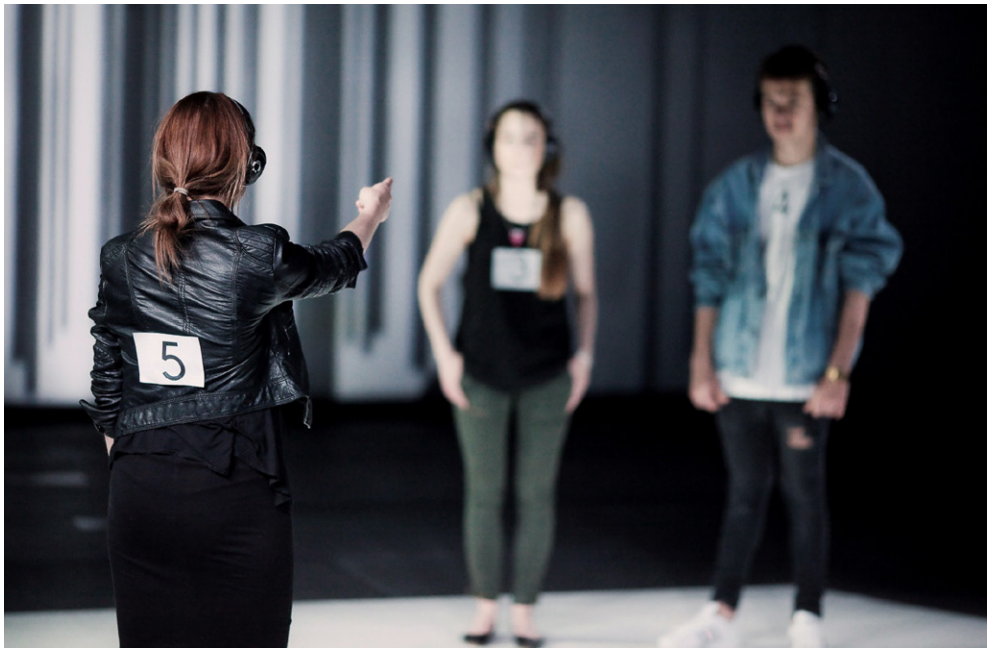

Figure 1. *The Method of National Constellations*. Photo by Marcin Onufryjuk (2015) (source: The University of Białystok Foundation)

After the WWII, Poland involuntarily became part of the Eastern Bloc. Communism had been already installed on the Polish territories since 1944 along the progress of the Red Army. The failure of initial attempts at cooperation with the Soviets against the Nazis, such as the Operation Tempest, made the Polish resistance movement, comprising the Home Army, National Military Union, and other smaller formations, gradually turn against the new occupant: the Soviet soldiers, political agents, and their local collaborators. The anti-communist resistance remained active till 1947, with few groups fighting the regime into the 1960s. During that time, many a member of the underground was deported to Gulags, imprisoned, or executed. Incriminated by the communist state, they have recently been referred to as the "cursed soldiers", and widely celebrated as freedom fighters, yet to strong opposition from the communities, such as the Belarusian minority in Podlasie, who in the past experienced brutal violence from some of the local partisan units and leaders, which they believe was ethnically motivated. The situation can be seen as a typical example of conflict between the official and vernacular modes of collective memory.

Against that socio-historical background, *The Method of National Constellations* (see Figure 1) was inspired by an official report, published in 2005, closing an investigation carried out by the Institute of National Remembrance (INR), Poland – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation into the alleged pacifications of Belarusian/Orthodox villages in the multiethnic, borderland region of Podlasie by a Polish-nationalist and anti-communist partisan unit commanded by captain Romuald Rajs, aka Bury, in winter

1946. Founded on archival documents and witness testimonies, the report confirms there were 79 people killed in a series of events that can be referred to, according to the prosecutor on that case, as "exhibiting the traits of genocide" (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005).[14] In addition, Michał Stankiewicz interviewed a child survivor of those events, and incorporated some of her, now an elderly lady, recollections to the performance in the form of an audio recording. These two sources made the historical basis for the performance, to be artistically rendered into a set of scenes-situations, guided by a narrator, and engaging the participants within a network of social roles, relations, and interactions.

Each of the performances was planned as an encounter of around 10 people, who were referred to as the Users of the Situation (occasionally, a larger public was allowed to watch the performance from the position of the Observers of the Situation).[15] Before the participants entered the performance space, they were equipped with wireless headphones, and randomly assigned subsequent numbers. Throughout the course of the performance they were called by those numbers, as they were invited to step in the action, or refer to one another. The main performance space was marked by a white hexagonal flooring; whenever a participant was to enter that space, the spot they were to take was lit up. Together with instructions given by the narrator, and roles taken by the participants, the board-like space created the sense of game to the entire performance (at times reminiscent of a role-playing game, live action role-playing, or even a video game[16]).

What follows is an example of a scene scripted for the performance, authored by Michał Stankiewicz.[17] It is a scene of execution. Four participants perform the roles of Polish partisans (Janek and Bury) and Belarusian villagers; the others remain seated around the hexagonal floor. The participants are not expected to play or interpret their roles dramatically, but to simply follow the instructions (though, as a professional actor with whom I spoke about the project pointed out, everyone can do it in their own way):

> "Now look at the whole group. Look around. You make the group. Take care of it.
>
> [5], your name is Janek. Step in field 11.
>
> You are 19. You fled from Volhynia. The Ukrainians murdered your family. When you came back to the village, your house had been gone. You slept in a stranger's bed linen.
>
> [5], Janek, the day when you joined the unit was sunny and frosty. Mornings in the forest can be very chilly. Bury, your commander, teaches you which bedding to sleep on so as not to wake up wet from the ground.

[14] In 2019, the INR issued an official statement questioning the thesis included in the report that the pacifications had been driven by ethnic or religious sentiments. It is argued that the entire action was political in nature, and directed against the local people who actively supported the communist regime, and that the term "genocide" is not adequate to the scale, course, and effects of the events. It is also reminded that in legal terms none of the commanders involved can be presently considered guilty of crime (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2019).

[15] *The Method of National Constellations* was performed over 15 times, initially in a hired post-industrial space of a municipal arts gallery Galeria Arsenał in Białystok (2014), later in theatrical spaces within the Contemporary Art Days Festival in Białystok (2015), and Touch the Theatre Festival in Łódź, Poland (2016).

[16] On the other hand, the participants also made connections to the forum theatre, and applied drama. We explicitly distanced ourselves, though, from any association (incited by the title of the performance) with therapeutic methods, such as the Family Constellations.

[17] With Karol Dworakowski and Piotr Sułkowski. Translated from Polish by Emilia Kiszycka.

[1], step in field 20.

You are Bury. You're the commander. Your call is: "Those who fear death, step forward". Repeat.

Repeat.

Look at Janek.

In the late evening, in the village of Puchały Stare, the partisans detain 30 men.

[1], Bury, turn your back at Janek.

Janek, step in field 23.

The next day, in the early morning, the firing squad takes the people to the forest.

[3], step in field 2. You are Belarusian.

[4], step in field 9. You are Belarusian, too.

[3], say: Please, don't kill me. Say: Please. Repeat.

[4], say: Please, don't kill me. Say: Please. Repeat.

[3], say it in your own words now.

[5], choose whom you're going to kill. Think it over.

Take aim.

Stop aiming.

Now take aim at the area that you're going to shoot at. The head, (perhaps) the heart, (maybe) the stomach.

Take aim.

[5], count to five, aloud.

[To the chosen person] Lie down on the ground.

Lie still. You haven't had a chance to say goodbye to your close ones.

[PAUSE] Go back to your places".

The above excerpt from the script demonstrates well the method behind the construction of the scenes in the performance. Following the historical material, social roles and relations, such as: soldier-commander, partisan-villager, Pole-Belarusian, parent-child, woman-man, Catholic-Orthodox, or neighbours, were condensed from the whole to be assumed by the participants within the "here and now" of the performance. The linkage with the past events was established not so much through their historical knowledge, as their contemporary embodied understanding of the situation, clearly affected by their prior real-life experiences (for instance, of being a parent themselves). That linkage was supported with certain "realistic" hints, including: a video footage of a winter forest filmed on the site of the executions, a voice recording of an elderly woman – a child witness to the killing of her father, and objects: a stone – to be touched by the participants for the sensation of coldness (similar to that of a hand of a dead human), and a candle – of the kind used for the Candlemas day – to be lit by the participants in one of the scenes.[18] On the other hand, to anchor the participants in the

[18] Some of the killings took place on that day.

present, they were constantly reminded that they were taking part in a theatrically designed situation: they were directly instructed by the narrator, literally asked to enter a scene, or go back to their seats, encouraged to take action, look closer, or observe, and each of them performed several different randomly assigned roles. The narration contained site-specific references to the arts spaces where the performance was set (with the participants moving around rooms and corridors as a part of the script), as well as some self-referential comments, for instance on the ethical ambiguity of the appropriation of real life histories within an artistic framework. By means of its authoritative style, it also made transparent the power relations within the performance (connected to the artist-participant divide). At the end, the participants were invited to share their first thoughts and feelings in their group, which – while still being a part of the event – also provided for a more analytical insight into their experiences.

Thus assembled, *The Method of National Constellations* can be seen as representative of the model of participation in art, theatre in particular, that we shall call directed, or heteronomous (*e.g.* Kaitavuori, 2018; Niziołek, 2016, 2018b). In this instance, the participant is invited to engage in a happening, installation, or situation, to mention but a few possibilities, constructed by an artist and already put on display. Their input is active and creative, spontaneous even, yet limited by a given script or design. The model is based on cooperation between the artist and the participant (as both have to agree on the "rules of the game"), with the latter taking the role of the user – shaping their own experience from the provided arts material, player – a specific kind of user, typically engaging with game-like elements and structures, or observer – involved in critical self-reflection stimulated by a narration or an immersive experience, often challenging the notion of spectatorship.

3.2. *Prayer: A Common Theatre*

Figure 2. *Prayer: A Common Theatre*. Photo by Paweł Tadejko (2016)
(source: The University of Białystok Foundation)

Prayer (see Figure 2) began from the artist's fascination with the writings of Alexievich, the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2015. The unique quality of her historical reportages was perhaps best encapsulated by the award citation: "for her polyphonic writings, a monument to suffering and courage in our time" (The Nobel Prize, 2015). On that account, we have chosen one of her books, *Chernobyl Prayer. A Chronicle of the Future* (Alexievich, 2016),[19] a collection of stories from ordinary people who had witnessed the reactor accident in the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, Ukraine (back then part of the Soviet Union) in 1986,[20] to examine a more autonomous, creative, and spontaneous model of participation in theatre. The sharing of reading experiences and impressions became the leitmotiv of the new project. This time, instead of structuring the performance in advance, we opted for an open, and partly chance-driven framework, as well as a longer-term engagement of the participants.

The book, composed of "monologues" and "choirs" of the disaster survivors, is in itself a record of collective memory, recalling, vocalizing, and narrating the event. But it is also "a chronicle of the future", a record of collective eco-trauma,[21] anticipating more ecological perils to come. As such, it represents a curious case of memory not only looking back, into the past, but also ahead, into the future. In order to pass the stories collated by Alexievich on – but, if possible, without appropriating or theatralising them – we invited the participants (again, about 10 people per performance) to read the reportage, and each choose a passage of approximately half a page to learn by heart and later perform on stage. Then, in the course of workshops and rehearsals, we discussed their choices of passages, and the motivations behind them – usually their own personal stories and memories that let them connect with (or distance themselves from) the book.[22] The performance was built up from those elements, joined together into a whole by a very simple dramaturgy. The participants, all seated on the stage in a row of chairs, presented their parts to the audience in random order, one after another called by their names to the front of the stage and speaking to a single microphone placed there. The following "monologue" was delivered by Kamila Ciok, one of almost 70 participants, with whom we worked over a span of two years:

> "I used to say, 'I love you'. But I couldn't imagine just how much I loved him. I had no idea. […] I left him, and when I came back, there was an orange on the table. A really big one, pink rather than orange. He smiled. 'Somebody gave it to me. You have it'. The nurse motioned through the curtain that the orange couldn't be eaten. Once it had been lying near him, you couldn't even touch it let alone eat it. 'Go on, eat it', he said. 'You love oranges'. I took the orange. And just then he closed his eyes and dozed off" (Alexievich, 2016, pp. 6, 15–16).

[19] Due to an earlier, American translation, the book goes also by the title *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (Alexievich, 2006).

[20] For that book, over a period of 10 years, Alexievich interviewed more than 500 eyewitnesses, including soldiers, firefighters, members of the cleanup teams (the so-called liquidators), physicians, physicists, politicians, teachers, relatives of the victims, displaced residents of the nearby towns and villages.

[21] The notion of eco-trauma refers to the collective stress response to human-induced ecological threats, such as: global warming, pollution, unsustainable resource management, *etc.*, which finds many a representation in cultural production, including cinema and literature (*e.g.* Narine, 2015).

[22] Because air currents carried the radioactive gases and dust over much of Europe, and to a lesser extent, over the rest of the northern hemisphere, some of the participants in our project were affected by the accident themselves (exposed to the moving radioactive material), others, born in the late 1990s, were too young to even realise that such an incident took place. I was six at that time, and the director was three.

> "I've chosen this fragment, because it reminds me of the history of my mum and dad's love. My mum is from Dagestan, and my dad was Polish. Their love made them stay here, in Warsaw, but my dad got sick, and after a short while, after two years of marriage, he died. Before that, they didn't know each other long. They wrote letters. In that marriage, by his side, my mum felt safe. She didn't need to be prepared for any dangerous tempest or hurricane, because he was next to her. Andrzej was there. And she was Diana – his wife. My dad died when I was one year and seven months old. He didn't make it to my second birthday. My mum stayed here, of the respect and love she had for him. My dad wanted me to grow up in Poland very much. It was difficult for my mum to be here on her own. There were people who wanted her to leave. They didn't want her here, and didn't want her to keep me. They wanted to take me away from her, and send her back to Dagestan, where her place was supposed to be. My mum fought them all, because she loved my dad. And there was I. And she wanted the best for me. So she sacrificed herself. She sacrificed her own safety, and her own life, which could have been different for her, easier. She wouldn't have to work illegally, and be refused her earnings. But she did that. Because she loved. And somewhere in that love, there was pain. But that very love, for me, and for my dad, also gave her strength, and she held to that strength. She is a great role model for me. That's why I believe in the one endless love that my mum has had for me and for my dad to this day. My mum didn't find anyone else. But she has me. I am two people, two loves. I deeply respect my mum, and I'm grateful to her for who I am".[23]

Ciok's story should be seen as one-of-a-kind, for each of the participants provided a unique input in the performance, and each performance was completely different. It is illustrative, though, of how the participants constructed their connections to the past and – via unexpected and unpredictable associations – affiliated with the collective memory of the Chernobyl disaster. Under the umbrella notion of unconditional and everlasting love, a story of a woman attending to her beloved husband dying from radiation, triggered familial memories connected to the participant's own late father, and strong feelings she had for her dedicated and courageous mother. Through such associations and connections, the project revealed the creative capability of collective memory. As Alexievich noted in another of her reportages, *The Unwomanly Face of War:*

> "[…] the narrators are not only witnesses – least of all are they witnesses; they are actors and makers. It is impossible to go right up to reality. Between us and reality are our feelings. I understand that I am dealing with versions, that each person has her version, and it is from them, from their plurality and their intersections, that the image of the time and the people living in it is born" (2018, xxi).

Obviously, Alexievich refers here to eyewitnesses and their varied versions of history. *Prayer* demonstrates what happens when these histories are carried forward, cited or retold by others in different times, and how the experiences, feelings and situation of the carriers interfere with the "original". The nuclear disaster as a historical event; the protagonists' versions of history; the writer's narrative, polyphonic as it is, which nevertheless creatively mixes the accounts and cuts the story down to less than 300 pages; the reception of the book, with personal additions made by the readers; their performances inspired by reading, which once

[23] Translated from Polish by the author of the article.

again process the material; the impressions of the audience, and further circulation of the stories, as the memory of the performance.[24] They get all assembled in a collective memory.

Finally, whereas it is common for memory scholars to see performance as an alternative to text or document (*e.g.* Schneider, 2011; Taylor, 2003), *Prayer* was devised so as to combine these two aspects of collective memory, for reading aloud, reciting, or telling a story to an audience is undoubtedly an embodied, performative experience (which is perhaps best realised by professional actors).[25] The participants in the project were not only free to choose the text they wished to present, and provide it with a personal context, but also decide on the manner of their presentations. It was up to them what and how they wanted to contribute to the project (though, still within a given general framework), and on the other hand, it was our responsibility to create an environment conducive to such an autonomous expression. Thus, *Prayer* can be regarded as an example of a different kind of cooperative participation, in which the participant takes the role of the co-creator of a theatrical piece, enjoying a certain level of agency and autonomy, and sharing power with the artist. The project had also provided a model for our next socio-artistic venture, and substantially informed the original theatre-based research framework used for it.

3.3. *Bieżenki*

Figure 3. *Bieżenki*. Photo by Marcin Onufryjuk (2018)
(source: The University of Białystok Foundation)

[24] According to Suzanne Lacy, a performance has three circles of audiences: "immediate audience" who attend the performance and experience it directly, "media audience" who experience the artwork indirectly, through documentation, or press coverage, and "audience of myth and memory" who carry it over time, in the life of a community, or in the literature of art. All of these circles may be regarded as integral to the work's composition (Lacy, 1995b, pp. 179–180).

[25] I have also addressed this problem elsewhere (see Niziołek, 2018b).

Likewise the previous project, *Bieżenki* (see Figure 3) was inspired by a book – a literary, historical reportage by Aneta Prymaka-Oniszk Bieżeństwo *1915: The Forgotten Refugees* (2016), and developed by an interdisciplinary team, comprising, apart from myself and Michał Stankiewicz, literary researchers Katarzyna Sawicka-Mierzyńska and Danuta Zawadzka.

In short, *bieżeństwo* is a regional term used to refer to a wave of civilian migration from today's Eastern Poland (then the Russian Partition) that took place during the WWI, most notably circa 1915, when the Germans broke the Eastern frontline. On their retreat, the Russian army widely used the tactics of scorched land and propaganda of fear in order to force the displacement of local people, many of whom were Rus' peasants and Orthodox, and among them women with children.

The migration was clearly marked by class, ethnic, religious, and gender divisions, which has affected the way that historical experience has been transmitted later. The memories of the refugeehood have been saved and communicated mostly privately, within families and local communities. They have also been largely absent from the mainstream public historical discourse. There seem to be a few reasons behind that closure, among them, the already mentioned, gendered nature of the experience of the refugeehood that made it "invisible" to the historian, and the wider public. Thus, the term *bieżenki*, a neologism used in the project's title, signifies female war refugees.[26]

There were seven participants in the project, seven females, descendents of the refugees (except for one), engaged as content providers, co-creators, and on-stage performers. The performance structure was non-linear, based on a number of interwoven, yet narratively unconnected stories. Each of the individual performances was different in terms of content, as well as "style". There were also certain meta-narrative elements to each of them that shed light on the process of memory keeping and making, and justified the performance structure. At the end, also the audience became involved, with their own memories and comments.

Two of the participants were already on their private mission to save the memory of *bieżeństwo*. Iwona Zinkiewicz was a protagonist in Prymaka-Oniszk's book, telling about the profound impact of the migration on her home village and her family. She was also the author of a story for the collection *Here I Am, because They Returned* (Kondratiuk et al., 2017), edited by another participant in the project, Anna Kondratiuk. Kondratiuk, in turn, adapted for the performance her familial story from the collection, one about the comforts (!) of her great-great grandmother's stay with some affluent relatives in Russia. In contrast, sisters Anna Gryniewicka and Marta Diemianiuk received very few memories of *bieżeństwo* from their family, and joined the project to "begin the search for their own roots". Helena Dudel was a second-time participant; a year before, she took part in *Prayer*. As a granddaughter of a refugee, she focused on the notion of parental devotion, and the moral dilemmas of survival. Dorra Ostrożańska gave an emotional and intimate account of her very close relationship with her grandmother, who by some unfortunate mistake was not properly identified in Prymaka-Oniszk's book. Ostrożańska completed her narration with a number of personal heirlooms, such as scarves, doll dresses, and portrait photographs. The youngest participant was Ksymena Wojtkowska, a student at my department, who despite the lack of any familial

[26] Linguistically, both nouns – *bieżenki* and *bieżeństwo* – are derivations of the Russian and Belarusian verb *bieżać*, but also of the old Polish *biežeć*, meaning to go, to run, or to hurry, in this case, to run away.

connections to the refugeehood, was attracted to the project by its very topic. In fact, owing to that peripheral positioning, she played a very special role in the performance. It was the role of a connection maker: between the group and the audience, the descendents of the refugees and the mixed theatrical public (also see Niziołek & Sawicka-Mierzyńska, 2019).

The performance ended with a discussion between the participants and the audience, which encouraged not only questions and comments, but also additional testimonies. At that point, the stage and auditorium symbolically shifted, and a wider performance space was established; now, it was the participants who listened to the memories of the members of the audience, observed their reactions and expressions. By means of participation in an ephemeral, theatrical assembly, the project instituted a case of "affiliative memory" – transmittable beyond the family, across generations, communities, and other lines of difference (see Hirsch, 2012, pp. 21–22, 246–247). What we eventually arrived at was an assemblage of memory, very much constructed using found materials – stories, images, emotions, behaviours, objects, taken from a variety of sources, to be creatively reassembled, put together as a new entity, a new meaning conferred on them, yet with a certain level of unfinishedness and incompleteness. Having told their histories, the participants left the stage – ever open – to other narratives and emotions, to additions, corrections, resonances, and contexts, still to come, yet to be revealed.

Methodologically, the project *Bieżenki* allowed crystallisation of an original, practice-driven procedure for theatre-based participatory research (partly already present in *Prayer*), which comprises:

- The use of nonfiction literature as a pretext for engaging participants;
- Sharing and exploring life histories (memories) in group discussions, workshops, and rehearsals;
- Monitoring the whole process by means of observation and self-observation;
- Theatre performance as a form of public expression and wider public (audience) involvement;
- Follow-up group discussions and individual interviews with participants.[27]

4. Collective memory as assemblage

Since Maurice Halbwachs and his seminal work on the social frameworks of memory, collective memory has been usually defined in purely communicative terms, as a product of social relations within groups of different scale and scope, from families, to communities, to nations (from micro- to macro-level), who share knowledge of the (their) past among themselves and pass it on from generation to generation. Thus defined, collective memory is socially framed or constructed in the form of self-knowledge or self-narrative of the group, which is predominantly an interpretative task (Halbwachs, 1992). With regard to the content, collective memory is, in a broad sense, a textual entity; hence, the study of collective memory involves "reading" rather than "assembling". This can be considered a reductionist approach, not only due to the essentialist presupposition (collective memory as the "essence" of the group, their

[27] Full discussion of this methodology is to be held in another article.

identity), but also in the light of the variety of practices discussed above. Collective memory is obviously inclusive of the text or narration, but it is also so much more.

The avant-garde assemblages of the 20th century were made of a wide assortment of found objects and materials, and could be created of literally anything. It was the character and history of the components, and the manner or rhythm of their juxtaposition within the resultant whole that provided an assemblage artwork with its formal properties and possibly some extra-aesthetic meaning. Hence, following the "method" of assemblage art, one must, first and foremost, see the assemblage of memory as an open constellation of a wide array of diverse elements: historical knowledge, different readings of history, popular imagery and beliefs, folktales, stories shared within communities, dreams, cross-generational obligations, emotions and other sensorial impressions, bodily expressions, gestures and movements (some inherited, some invented), witnesses and their descendents, as well as other participants in the memory, myth, ritual or event (such as writers, artists, researchers, or theatrical audiences), the social roles of memory givers, receivers and keepers, various media of memory transmission (including literature and theatre), the common concepts of heroism, victimhood, violence, victory, failure, justice, disaster, and other cultural meanings of the past, as well as future warnings, apocalyptic visions, fate and god's omens, spaces and "sites of memory" (like monuments and rituals, or theatre),[28] objects of every-day use or historical value, the present political context and a political action (to save or honour the memory, break the silence, protect heritage), the natural surroundings, "contaminated landscapes",[29] spectres, nostalgia, resentment, the desire to be remembered and part of collective memory.

Regarding Deleuze's concept, thus composed, the assemblage of memory offers quite a striking case of the multipilicity of many heterogeneous bodies and terms that establishes active connections between them and across their different natures. However loose, fluid, or vague, it is evidently a co-functioning entity, a symbiosis or alliance of a sort. Within the assemblage of memory fact can merge with fiction, real-life with a dream, the past with the present and future, humans with objects, ideas with emotions, nature with culture, life with politics, science with art, along and across the lines of these epistemological divides. There is no arbitrary limit to the number of bodies or terms included, and no restriction as to their character (identity) or origin (descent), as long as all the parts fit together and cooperate with each other. Then they can enhance the affective (creative, performative) capability of the whole.

Conclusions

In addition, the assemblage theory sheds some light on the modern divide of collective memory from history (or historical science, to be precise), and may be helpful to understand

[28] It was Pierre Nora (1989) who expanded the idea of collective memory by highlighting its localised nature. Sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire*, are not merely monuments or memorials, but all the sites of recalling and remembering the past (not to be reduced to physical places), be them history books, literature, anniversary celebrations, photographs, or theatre, for that matter.

[29] The phrase has been used by a nonfiction writer Martin Pollack (2014) to refer to many a place across Europe, burdened with tragic history of killings, which, however, show no visible, or otherwise sensible traces of that kind of past, being hidden or forgotten. For Pollack, it is our moral obligation to map those places, in order to honour the victims, and not let crimes pass unnoticed.

the hierarchical relation between the two. History, the objective and factual knowledge of the past, corresponds to a stratum (Deleuze and Guattari), or a relatively well-codified and clearly-delineated assemblage (DeLanda). It relies on historical evidence: documents, artefacts, plausible testimonies. This knowledge is aggregated over time by means of specialist research or investigation organised in accordance with the methodological rules of the discipline, from source criticism, to specifically historical re-enactment – when a historian tries to imagine and understand what motivated the social actors in the past under the circumstances of that day (see Collingwood, 2005). It yearns for completeness. The stratum embraces the historical sources, the professional community of historians, the scientific procedures they follow, and their research results, disseminated through publication, discussion, and teaching. As such, it constitutes a sub-stratum of the larger stratum of humanities, and still a larger one of science. In the modern society, which favours science over other modes of knowledge, history is seen as superior to collective memory.

The historical stratum is not closed once and for all, though. In fact, it is ever exposed to decoding and deterritorialisation that come with illegitimate (unreliable) sources, unqualified historians, including amateurs, diversions from the scientific standards, be them politically, opportunistically, or otherwise motivated. For one thing, it is always captured in some kind of relationship with collective memory; the two may overlap (when facts and memories agree), interfere (when facts discredit a story, or the story questions the facts), engage in an exchange (when history reaches to the witness and testimony, or the gaps in collective memory are filled in with historical knowledge), compete (for the truth and position/status), and even dismiss one another (as biased, dubious, or violent – in the symbolic, power-related sense). Nevertheless, collective memory is the knowledge of the past of a completely different kind. By contrast to history, it needs no proof, orients itself towards the present (to what one feels or thinks about the past here and now), yields to subjectivity and one-sidedness. Together history and collective memory form the assemblage of the past – not in the chronological (past-present-future), but cultural sense: this is not the past that was, but the past that is here and now, and will be transmitted into the future. Both history and collective memory are nested in the past; they are simply produced by different rhythms, and articulated by different abstract machines.

By now it should be evident that, although the performative and narrative approaches are not mutually exclusive, reading or interpreting is not sufficient to access an assemblage of memory. To grasp and understand its operations, its mechanics and enunciations, we need to acknowledge the multipilicity, heterogeneity, and interrelatedness of its elements, and to do so, we need to be able to observe them at work, in action, in creation, to engage ourselves – being one more element of the assemblage – into the process of (per)forming connections between them. Participatory theatre and theatre-based action research seem to be capable of bringing us closer to that end, at the same time changing our understanding of what a collective memory is, with possibly political consequences. For, if we see memory as an assemblage, we see it as creative, pluralistic (polyphonic), and inclusive. We become able to move beyond the essentialist, integrative concept of a community of memory (potentially in conflict with other similar communities) towards the multitude and diversity of memories (potentially bridged across differences) within a community, even if only an ephemeral one.

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